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# Hungarian Minority Media in Romania: Toward a Policy of Professional Improvement

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*Romania's Hungarian population constitutes one of the most numerous ethnic minorities in Central Europe. This chapter describes the media of the Hungarian community in Romania (namely Transylvania) and emphasizes the need to improve the professional standards and performance of Hungarian journalists in the region. According to this analysis, the Hungarian media in Romania is characterized by elitism, uncritical attitudes towards minority leaders, and 'minority neurosis'. The chapter concludes with a series of proposals designed to improve journalistic performance, including recommendations regarding funding schemes and professional education.*

## **1. Introduction: The professional performance of Hungarian journalists in Romania**

The media of the Hungarians in Romania (or Hungarians in Transylvania) differs from most other minority media. Their newspapers and magazines are not mere appendices to the majority<sup>1</sup> press and their broadcast programs are not

1. Transylvania is one of the largest regions in Romania and includes the central and north-western parts of the country. For centuries, Transylvania was a part of the Hungarian Kingdom and at times enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. Hungarian kings invited Germans from Saxony to settle in Transylvania in the 12th and 13th centuries, and Romanians and Hungarians have been living next to one another since the early Middle Ages. The Catholic and Protestant Hungarian-speaking population was economically and politically dominant throughout the Middle Ages, after which this population lost its leading demographic, economic and political position. Because Romanians represented a majority in Transylvania while Hungarians accounted for only 30 percent at the time, this region was taken from Hungary and given to Romania at the Paris Peace Treaty after World War I. The inter-war period was characterized by peaceful territorial disputes between Romania and Hungary, and in 1940 Hungary succeeded in gaining back some parts of the lost territory, including the northern and central part of Transylvania. In 1944 Romania broke its alliance with Nazi Germany and joined the Soviet Army against Germany and Hungary and, as a victor, regained northern Transylvania. At the second Paris Peace Treaty after World War II, Hungary again acknowledged that Transylvania would be a part of Romania. Under communist regimes, the Soviet Union did not tolerate disputes over territory or minority matters; communist leaders in each country considered the 'Transylvania-problem' to be a taboo issue. In the spirit of 'revolutionary brotherhood', the Romanian communist regime in the early stage of communism seemed to favor the Hungarian

solely windows of the majority media, as is the case with many minority communities all over the world. Nor are their publications merely newsletters or brochures of certain minority non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as is common among some minority groups. The Hungarian-language media in Romania is a fully-fledged system, including television and radio stations as well as a press sector. This chapter investigates the particular problems and needs of this media system and provides relevant policy recommendations.

The particular policy problems under investigation are as follows:

1. The uncritical approach of journalists toward minority elites and public matters.
2. The lack of awareness of professional requirements and the inadequacy of professional training in the Hungarian media in Romania.
3. The lack of expert information and awareness about the importance of the above-mentioned issues.

This chapter is organized as follows: the first part explores critical features of the Hungarian media in Romania, while the second introduces the basic framework for a strategy designed to improve this media system. Finally, the paper analyzes possibilities for the implementation of new policies in major areas of the Hungarian media in Romania.

### *1.1. An uncritical approach to minority elites and public matters*

The discourse of the Hungarian media in Romania may be described as an *affirmative* or *approving* one. This means that the media tends to assume an uncritical view toward the minority community's political actors and public sphere while engaging in uniform patterns of speech and a 'uni-colored' reporting practice.

Over the past few years, a pluralization of views has emerged among the Hungarian political elite in Romania. Previously characterized by the assump-

population and integrated them into the structures of the Communist Party. After the Hungarian uprising of 1956, Romania's communist leadership became suspicious of Hungarians and, after 1975, the notorious Ceausescu regime launched a policy of massive assimilation. Today, the focus of the dispute has shifted away from territorial issues toward the status of Hungarian minorities in Hungary's neighboring countries. Arguments about minority rights or the extension and the nature of Hungarians' self-determination regained prominence after 1990 amid democratic, parliamentary and peaceful circumstances. At Romania's insistence, in a 1996 bilateral treaty Hungary restated its willingness to "never change" the territorial status quo regarding the Romanian-Hungarian frontier.

tion of general consensus, Hungarian<sup>2</sup> minority politics has been finding alternative ways of minority advocacy and the recruitment of leaders. A public debate is ensuing on what should be done to manage public issues and promote minority rights, with the potential for addressing key minority issues now conceived as having distinct options.

However, the minority media is not prepared for this new, more democratic political environment and often finds itself completely confused. The media's 'uni-colored' method of reporting and news writing was based upon a 'take one side' approach, which is no longer adequate in the new political environment, where balanced and equitable news depends on the ability of journalists to report on various distinct opinions in a balanced manner. Since the major Hungarian minority media have monopolies in their respective geographic areas (especially the daily newspapers), the population has no other source for balanced information on the Hungarian minority's internal affairs.

Because Hungarian minority journalists and editors are confused by the debates of minority leaders and intellectuals and their attempts to use the press to convey passionate, agitated political arguments, the media simply opts to disassociate itself from such debates. As a result, political arguments tend to flow unmediated, with only the quarrelling persons and the audience left to interpret the background information and nature of the debate.

### *1.2. Ignorance about professional and educational requirements*

Romania's Hungarian minority journalists ignore professional standards that in other parts of the world are considered to be effective, common and valuable. As a professor of media studies and sociological research methods and Director of the Hungarian Section of the Sociology Department at Babeş-Bolyai University, I was able to conduct extensive interviews with students in the Journalism Studies Department of this university (the most prestigious journalism program in Romania) who graduated between 1997-1999. These interviews revealed the extent of the tensions and shortcomings surrounding their journalistic education with teachers whose activity obviously did not meet professional requirements. Complaints were common regarding teachers' painfully inadequate practical training, and the practice of scheduling but not actually offering courses. Criticism of the journalism curriculum abounded, such as the story of the professor who taught the course 'News writing in press agencies,' but who never worked for a newspaper and took students sightseeing, claiming that it was more important for a jour-

2. In this paper, the term 'Hungarian' refers to Hungarians in Romania unless stated otherwise.

nalist to be knowledgeable about ‘local history’ than about news selection and news writing for the press. In another example, the professor of the course ‘The theory and practice of journalism’ (a basic course for first year students) offered no lectures but rather invited students from other faculties to relate stories about their faculties in class as a basis for a student newspaper. Both former and current students lamented about the professional incompetence of many faculty members, while at the media organizations many editors, managers and journalists complain about the weakness of young graduates from the Journalism Studies Department.

### *1.3. Lack of awareness, isolation and the failure to consult expert sources*

My role as a member of the steering committee of the Hungarian Journalists Association of Romania has also provided me with insights – from interviews and participant observation – into the extent to which members of the Hungarian minority media in Romania lack the kinds of connections with scholars and professionals common among journalists in many other communities. This isolation, compounded by the lack of basic journalism training and sometimes general education among Hungarian journalists in Romania, leads to a situation where journalists often produce unreliable information without consulting expert sources, especially in specialist areas such as the economy, public administration and law. To cite a telling example from the mid-1990s, one Hungarian minority journalist wrote an opinion article in which he mocked the ‘snobbism’ of American journalists who used the funny, very new, peculiar, strange and comic characterization of black people as ‘African Americans’. The author was later forced to admit his ignorance in believing that he had just revealed a new and eccentric phenomenon rather than a widespread practice in the United States; nor had he ever heard of the phrase ‘political correctness’. During a live interview broadcast, another journalist once asked me as a sociologist what should be done to stop the current decrease in the world’s population (!). It was obvious that the journalist was not aware of the fact that, although the worldwide Hungarian population is decreasing, the overall world population is increasing exponentially.

## **2. Background: Hungarian media in Romania**

As mentioned, a distinct and whole-scale Hungarian-speaking media system exists in Romania. This section will provide some background and primary characteristics of the Hungarian minority and its media system.

According to official Romanian census data, 1,620,000 Hungarians lived in Romania in 1992, a figure that by January 1, 2000 had decreased to 1,527,700 –

about 6.7 percent of Romania's total population. The Hungarian minority did not come to Romania as immigrants but have been an indigenous population for about a thousand years, i.e. they represent an historical minority with an integral society encompassing all usual social strata in modern societies. Considering the size of its population, the Hungarian minority in Romania lives in a relatively large geographical area. Due to substantial regional differences, the minority media is divided into subsystems.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike many ethnic minorities in Romania or abroad, the Hungarians from Transylvania have not assimilated significantly into Romanian society; they maintain a strong sense of Hungarian national identity, language and customs. Other less numerous minorities in Romania have assimilated almost completely and use the language of the majority in everyday communication and mass media consumption. Media publications in their original mother tongue circulate occasionally as a means of keeping traditions alive.

The public *Romanian Television* creates and broadcasts programs in the Hungarian language several hours a week from its central studio in Bucharest, with several additional hours of programming produced by the regional studios. The Hungarian-speaking staff works relatively independently, and in the past ten years has struggled with little more than shrinking broadcasting time. *Duna Television*, a satellite-based public service channel broadcasted from Hungary and designed for the Hungarian minorities and the diaspora abroad, is the most frequently watched channel by the Hungarians in Romania, but its audience share varies across regions and social groups (Magyari & Veres 1998, pp. 11-15).

As far as radio is concerned, the central department of *Romanian Radio* in Bucharest has a one-hour daily program in Hungarian, while regional radio studios broadcast four-hour programs from major Transylvanian cities. In some regions, these radio programs are the most popular among Hungarians, while in Transylvania in general the most popular radio is a broadcast from Hungary (the Kossuth channel of the public *Hungarian Radio*).<sup>4</sup> Although obtaining a license for audio-visual activity is rather difficult and requires some Romanian-language air-time, audio-visual legislation in Romania does allow the establishment of local radio and television stations in Hungarian. In addition to the programs broadcast in Hungarian by the public service *Romanian Radio* and *Romanian Television*, ethnic Hungarians support a relatively diverse and institutionalized independent broad-

3. For an encyclopedic account of the world's minority press, see Riggins (1992).

4. According to 1998 data, about 40-48 percent of the Hungarian inhabitants of Transylvania listen to Hungary's Kossuth Radio for a varying length of time. This is followed by 34-40 percent who listen to the Hungarian-speaking programs of Romanian Radio at Tîrgu Mureş (Magyari & Veres 1998, pp. 24-25).

casting scene, primarily in towns where Hungarians constitute a majority. Local Hungarian commercial radios and televisions operate according to the decisions of the National Audio-Visual Council (the central media regulatory body in Romania), but this does not mean complete helplessness and financial dependence and they tend to have better negotiating positions than the minority press. Rather than a conscious central media policy favoring or opposing Hungarian interests, it depends upon the state of the central budget whether or not Hungarian television or radio stations receive occasional support.

Compared with minority media systems serving the approximately two million Hungarians living in neighboring countries, the Hungarian media in Romania receives the least amount of state financial support. The Hungarian political elite in Romania urges the state to support the press in some way, and especially the minority press. Some occasional support has always been granted by the Ministry of Culture or Education for those three or four publications that serve the elite culture, i.e. those focused on literature and criticism, including the reviews *Művelődés* ("Education"), *Korunk* ("Our Age") and *A Hét* ("The Week"), which are published in several hundred and no more than two thousand copies respectively.

A great part of the Hungarian media in Romania operates in the form of private enterprise, producing some 65 publications, including daily papers, weeklies, monthlies and other periodicals, according to the 1999 registry of the Hungarian Journalists Association in Romania (AHJR) (Ágoston & Ambrus 1999, pp. 56-60). Local (or regional) daily Hungarian newspapers have the biggest and most reliable market, with 'profitability' constituting smooth, continuous publication with extremely modest development through reinvestments. All of these newspapers are short (about 16 pages), have small format, and are traditionally called 'county daily papers'. They are typically the only local newspaper in their respective region (county) with no overlapping readership and no competition. In addition to these county papers, two Hungarian daily newspapers are available in Transylvania (the 'countrywide daily newspapers'); several Hungarian weeklies are also available throughout Romania.

Hungarian media representatives safeguard their professional interests at the national (Romanian) level through the AHJR, lobbying minority politicians in Romania and fellow media representatives on issues of Romania's minority media policy as well as Hungary's media policy towards Hungarians outside the 'motherland'. Although Hungarian journalists in Romania insist upon the freedom and political independence of the press as well as the necessity for objective journalism, many can be described as exhibiting the following characteristics:

- 1) lack of professionalism;
- 2) elitism;
- 3) reliance on uncritical discourse towards the minority elite;
- 4) plagued by 'minority neurosis'.

### *2.1. Lack of professionalism*

Members of the Hungarian minority media in Romania often lack professionalism, in that they are either ignorant of or fail to understand the importance of many common, effective, and valuable professional standards practiced in other parts of the world. Internationally recognized standards are substituted by a peculiar system of special demands. A unique system of operations and values has been developed which can be described as a kind of 'alternative professionalism' (as opposed to being unprofessional). This alternative system influences the writing style, page-setting, interviewing, reporting, news selection and even the training of young journalists in the Hungarian minority media system. Journalistic standards that are basic and routine in many countries, such as the separation of fact from commentary, objectivity, distance, and proper news selection, are frequently ignored (cf. McQuail, 1994, pp.213-220).

The potential for amateurism is present in every aspect of minority media due to circumstances surrounding small readership size and large geographic coverage, few advertisers, and the sense that minority media is somehow associated with the volunteerism of a 'social movement'. However, due to the extraordinary situation of the Hungarian minority media as described above, such amateurism cannot be accepted. This media serves as the only permanent, daily source of information for the readers, resembling a 'non-minority' media in both its institutional character and market position.

Unlike in Western countries, where news selection tends to be determined by that which is extraordinary or 'newsworthy' (e.g. McQuail 1994, pp. 213-220), members of the Hungarian minority media in Romania tend to publish news events that are of everyday interest, usual and common. Although the subjects are not necessarily interesting, they are chosen for their ability to reflect the everyday life of the 'minority person', i.e. the Hungarian in Romania. The problem is that being a Hungarian and living an everyday life as a Hungarian in Romania is not newsworthy, and as a result the media fails to attract new readers.

Although identifying the specific reasons for unprofessional media would require a separate study, it is noteworthy that the leaders of the Hungarian journalistic community are generally satisfied with the overall status quo and prefer to focus their attention on details such as linguistic rules among journalists. Apart



from occasional complaints to specific groups by editors about their untrained employees and their inability or unwillingness to fire them, public debate regarding the professionalism of journalists (or lack thereof) is almost entirely absent.

At the same time, of course, there are prize-winning Hungarian cameramen, film directors and reporters from Romania whose work is highly appreciated abroad. Their success is typically based on extraordinary technical skills using computers, professional video cameras and studio equipment and, once successful, they tend to leave Romania to work in Hungary.

## 2.2. *Elitism*

The lack of professionalism is partially rooted in elitism which, as expressed by the Hungarian minority media in Romania, is based on the dominant idea that quality journalism in a sense must be connected to literature. The humanities – classical studies or ‘belles-lettres’ – are considered superior to the social sciences including sociology, political science, etc. The ‘ideal’, ‘valuable, or ‘hard-working’ journalist is well-trained in Hungarian literature. Professional quality in journalism is frequently measured by how closely it resembles literature or its *literature-likeness*, with poetic views and belletristic genres and styles highly praised. A poet or novelist is assumed to be a good journalist in all areas (e.g. political news writing), and a leading poet or novelist is automatically considered a leading journalist, newspaper editor, columnist, or communication and media studies expert. The traditionally strong influence of literary circles means that this attitude applies not only to the editing of literary reviews and periodicals but is also present in every field of journalism whether it concerns politics, sports, magazines or advertising. As a result, media policy is sometimes driven by an unwillingness to address the realities of cultural stratification and market conditions in favor of an elitist media policy. Although the presence of men of letters and the predominance of high culture in the press are not necessarily harmful, they are completely out of place and sterile when forced upon certain types of media activity.

The Hungarian minority elite in Romania (as well as the elite in Hungary in its discourse) tends to think about the community of ethnic Hungarians in Romania not as a society, which it actually is, but as an elite cultural community. Ideas about *culture* in general are confused with *high culture* in particular, so that the culture of the educated strata and the elite is assumed to be representative of the entire community. The 1.5 million Hungarians in Romania is seen to form a highly educated collective, or at least a community in which every member is able and eager to read traditional literary works and intricate politi-

cal studies. This mistake has its roots not only in elite psychology and sociology, but within a specific historical context as well.

Between the two world wars, literature, politics and the press forged a very peculiar union in Transylvanian Hungarian culture. Despite the fact that Hungarian journalism of the inter-war period usually consisted of literary articles, literary criticism, literary correspondence and essay writing, many current media leaders who set the tone of professional Hungarian journalism in Romania believe that inter-war newspaper practices should form the basis of present-day journalism training (Magyari 1996, pp. 45-46). This trend is represented by the great number of commemorations and publications in the press devoted to this period. Hungarian students of the Babeş-Bolyai University journalism department attending the course 'Modern methods of information gathering' generally memorize the works of 'our great literary men' (mostly writers, poets, priests, or politicians from the inter-war period), while non-Hungarian students at the same department are taught how to use the Internet.

Of course, the Hungarian community in Romania is actually highly stratified in economic and cultural terms, with an 'elite' as well as a 'mass' that partakes in 'mass culture', although elitist minority journalists seemingly deny this fact. As a consequence, the Hungarian media in Romania is rarely entertaining and maintains a limited audience. In all parts of Transylvania where Hungarians live today, successful magazines from Hungary, especially women's magazines, are available. *Nők Lapja* ("Women's Magazine"), a weekly magazine imported from Hungary, is the most popular magazine among Hungarians in Romania, and serves as a true alternative to those published by their own 'boring' media producers. In the Székely Land,<sup>5</sup> more people watch the commercial *TV3* channel from Hungary than the public service *Duna Television* from Hungary with programs intended to target the region.<sup>6</sup> In one of the largest Transylvanian cities, more Hungarians watch the Romanian commercial channel *PRO TV* than the Hungarian-speaking *Duna Television* on a daily or regular basis (Magyari 2000a).

### 2.3. 'Acommercialism'

'Acommercialism' among Hungarian minority media institutions, i.e., the lack of business orientation, is closely linked with elitism. Media institutions must adhere to a unique economic logic (McQuail 1994, pp. 206-211) with carefully

5. The Székely Land is a region in the middle of Romania in the Southeastern part of Transylvania. More than one third of the Hungarian minority lives there, constituting the majority of the region's inhabitants. They are a particular ethno-cultural group of Hungarians called Székelys.

6. Information provided from the staff of a local cable television (the precise data is confidential).

planned editorial guidelines, marketing strategies, and market-based decisions. The typical Hungarian media enterprise in Romania, however, operates more like a nonprofit civil organization than an economic player, with supervisors and editors serving as the managers of a foundation (sometimes successfully). At the same time, the power of editors-in-chief and publishers is restricted; editors-in-chief are sometimes even elected by the employees. As mentioned previously, many leading editors cannot (or do not) fire or punish members of their staff when necessary on professional grounds.

According to their rhetoric, Hungarian minority journalists consider their position and work to be a service for the minority community, supported by Hungary and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR). In this civil organization ethos, the roles of journalists, politicians, and everyday members of the minority community are often confused, despite their distinct differences in public life (Horváth 1996, pp. 39-43; Magyari 1996, pp. 43-47). For example, coverage of a county-level DAHR meeting where a leading politician criticized the newspaper covering the event consisted primarily of the reporter's counterattacks and harsh judgments of the politician. Readers with no journalism experience are often permitted to submit virtually unedited news articles and editorials. One editor defended his decision to allow a reader to write a series of what he admitted were "miserable editorials" on NATO and Romania's chances for NATO integration by claiming that the author was a "reputable writer" – the author was actually a well-known fiction storyteller!

The monopoly arrangements of most Hungarian minority media products allow for a commercial and unprofessional practices, and readers accustomed to this type journalism usually do not complain. And even if they did, alternative sources of daily community news do not exist.

### **3. The media discourse of the Hungarian minority media in Romania**

The two major peculiarities of the Hungarian media's dominant discourse are its *approving nature* and its marked *minority neurosis*.

#### *3.1. Approving discourse*

Rather than a discourse focused on debate within an environment of political pluralism, Hungarian minority media discourse in Romania is characterized by an overarching, homogeneous approval of Hungarian public life – one reason why Zoltán Bíró calls it an "affirmative" discourse (Bíró 1995, pp. 37-39). In an attempt to pre-

sent a unified minority voice, it is virtually impossible to find critical attitudes toward respected Hungarian minority leaders and organizations in the minority media.

Although the Hungarian community in Romania *seems* to legitimize its leaders according to their achievements (as in a meritocracy), in reality those personalities who shape public opinion are legitimized on the basis of their *perceived prestige*. Although the media quotes various minority leaders and organizations (politicians, writers, church groups, media organizations, etc.) and declares them to be “respected” and “well-known” professionals, their actual achievements are not analyzed or criticized. Once a leader is deemed a moral authority by the media, this authority is rarely questioned despite its often preconceived nature. Prestige itself quickly becomes more important than actual professional knowledge. Public authority figures in the Hungarian minority community gain further support, resources and prestige via connections with the media and political elites from Hungary that also take their authority for granted. In sociological terms, this system can be called a *supposed meritocracy* through which all Hungarian intellectual and elite public figures from Romania must be recruited.

This system of advancement based on prestige also contributes to the lack of professionalism in the media and even authoritarianism in the public discourse of the Hungarian minority. Once the media deems an individual or institution to be a public authority, any part of the media that dares question this authority is likely to be met with resistance and repudiation by the rest of the media. Although similar ‘supposed and *relativized* meritocracies’ occur in many modern, media-driven societies, the problem is exacerbated in the case of Hungarian minority media in Romania due to the overwhelming ethos dictating that ‘being united’ is a ‘national political interest’ for more effective minority advocacy with the Romanian and Hungarian governments. All ideas or opinions that appear to be in opposition to the dominant opinions are repudiated fiercely as an attempt to break this unity. This ethos of being united and even combative reinforces a monolithic and anti-pluralistic pattern of politics and policy, and contributes to the continued legitimacy of the ‘one party system’ for ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Right or wrong, over 95 percent of members of the Hungarian minority vote for the DAHR.<sup>7</sup>

7. Some initiatives were undertaken in an attempt to pluralize the Hungarian public sphere, including the so-called ‘internal elections’. The idea is that Hungarians will ‘elect’ their political leaders by choosing between several parties or fractions, or even between various DAHR politicians. Following the elections, DAHR’s new board will act as a kind of elected, pluralistic ‘parliament’ within the Hungarian community, and as a political party within the Romanian political system. The most important wings of DAHR will decide what platform the organization will undertake within the Hungarian community, the Romanian political system, in relations with Hungary, etc. for a pre-determined period of time. (Some Romanian politicians look suspiciously at this initiative as a form of ‘ethnic autonomy’.)

The Hungarian minority media definition of a politician appears to be someone who advocates for minority rights whether elected or not, and those who carry out such advocacy are welcome to submit media reports and cover parliament sessions. For example, although the entire staff of a Hungarian-language radio program was based in Bucharest with easy access to Parliament, the radio contracted a representative of DAHR as its long-term political correspondent. Unprofessional, elite, 'acommercial' and un-critical behavior is also exemplified by the attempt of the daily newspaper *Krónika* (Chronicle) to consider 'Transylvanian-Hungarian media awareness' by appointing members of the Hungarian minority leadership to an advisory council. The experiment offered the promise of introducing the minority media to a new management style, since *Krónika* employed a Western style of management with competitive employment, performance-based promotions and dismissals, a disciplined division of editorial responsibilities, market-based decision-making, etc. However, the council members quickly withdrew from the business-like minority daily, preferring the comforts of their usual media-related practices based on elite culture.

Most worrying is the tendency among minority journalists – as testified by my informal interviews – to not only accept a state of affairs where differing opinions are rarely allowed, but to *fail to even consider alternative opinions* in the course of their reporting, while relying wholeheartedly on the statements of the so-called honorable leaders. *Socialized and trained within the context of an anti-pluralistic political environment, most minority media representatives are simply not capable of professionally covering debates between political actors, and often even refuse to moderate such debates.* A new policy of media training is needed to educate minority journalists about professional reporting in a pluralistic, democratic society.

### 3.2. Minority neurosis

The term 'minority neurosis' here refers to the constant dramatization of minority problems by the minority media. Such media dramatization and exaggeration is understandable within the context of a minority media scene represented by only a few pamphlet-like publications and short broadcasts intended to mobilize minority rights advocacy. However, the constant dramatization of minority problems by a fully fledged media system intended to provide the only sources of national and global news, sports, advertising, classifieds, etc. is unprofessional and irresponsible.

The Hungarian minority media in Romania is neither nationalistic nor xenophobic and does not publish articles or programs scorning or judging the

Romanian nation or culture, although it is possible to find an occasional article hinting at Hungarian superiority. Therefore, the media is better characterized as exhibiting *minority neurosis* than *minority nationalism*. The media's mobilizing, propagating tone, intended to safeguard minority interests, is reminiscent of the Western European party press of the 1960s.

Hungarian minority journalists assume an "adversary role" (Weaver & Wilhoit 1986) marked by an approving attitude and minority neurosis. Given their inclination to consider minority advocacy as part of their job, they can be described as having an "adversary and advocacy role."

#### 4. Policy proposals

Although my participant observation and informal interviews have revealed problems with the Hungarian minority media system in Romania that require policy solutions, it is important to cautiously avoid regulating certain media activities in a way that would interfere with media freedom and/or the creative and independent character of good journalism, which would inevitably suffer from unrealistic bureaucratic requirements.

##### *4.1. Key organizations in minority media policy reform*

There are two groups of institutions that are instrumental in the implementation of existing Hungarian minority media policies in Romania:

###### *A. Funding institutions*

The first group is those organizations that influence the way Hungary's financial support for cultural, educational, research and media activities for Hungarian communities in neighboring countries is distributed. As a first step, the funds are transferred to several public foundations, the most important of which is the Illyés Foundation. To avoid being overwhelmed by hundreds of NGOs, the Hungarian government deals with those Hungarian minority organizations whose members have gained national elected offices (most importantly, seats in the parliament). In the case of Romania, the primary legitimate organization is the aforementioned DAHR.

In turn, DAHR grants these funds (technically via grant-giving groups or commissions) to other minority institutions such as theaters, schools, universities, media organizations, etc. The question of whether DAHR should be entitled to grant money to various institutions is not debated, because DAHR has overwhelming pub-

lic support as the most powerful minority political institution. However, the majority of the Hungarian community strongly believes that, as a political party, DAHR must formally delegate its grant-giving role to specialist groups or commissions. Although DAHR formally does so, in reality its national and local leadership and the circle of grant-giving 'professionals' in media and politics usually overlap.

These grant-giving groups, called 'Boards of Professionals', make decisions on funding applications submitted each year by dozens of individuals and institutions. The Board of Professionals that deals with the media distributes about USD 90,000 per year<sup>8</sup> according to annually determined principles and on the basis of the applications. Reform of this funding scheme will be an important policy instrument that can influence the Hungarian minority media problems addressed in this chapter, assuming that this reform links funding to principles of media professionalism, market-orientation, editorial and management effectiveness, etc.

#### *B. Journalism education organizations*

The professional Hungarian Journalists' Association in Romania (HJAR) recommends specific guidelines and principles of media activity as well as specific instruments and reform measures for policymakers and implementers. The HJAR runs the Ady Endre Press School, a private institution in Oradea (Nagyvárad) which offers one-year journalism training programs and includes faculty members from Hungary. Students pay tuition and are encouraged to engage in professional activity in the local media.

The Ady Press School and the aforementioned Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj (Kolozsvár in Hungarian) are the two institutions in Romania that offer journalism training for Hungarians. The latter offers a four-year university-level program in the Hungarian Section of the Journalism Department. Unfortunately, since 1993 this program has been characterized by the kind of professional relativism described earlier. Therefore, the HJAR is the key Hungarian minority media organization capable of establishing professional media criteria, even for institutions not belonging to the Association.

#### *4.2. Recommendations regarding professional training*

1. With regard to the Journalism Department of Babes-Bolyai University, classical studies subjects should be disassociated from practical journalism topics, so that senior faculty can keep their jobs and teach literature, history, etc. as

8. Although this is not a large amount and media is just one of the several items that are intended to be financed from this sum, it is nevertheless important aid.

background courses, while other (usually junior) faculty members teach journalism methods and techniques.

2. As in other departments of the Babeş-Bolyai University such as Sociology, Psychology, and Mathematics, visiting professors of journalism from Hungary should be invited to teach courses and/or provide lectures.
3. The media training provided by the Ady Endre Press School should be transformed from an undergraduate to a postgraduate degree, so that students are required to complete a higher education program before attending a one-year specialization in media studies.
4. The HJAR should issue special qualifications (diplomas) for the graduates of those institutions that adhere to a minimum level of professional journalism standards, thereby indirectly regulating the journalism training provided by several media systems (including that of Hungary).

#### *4.2. Recommendations regarding editorial practices*

I recommend the following measures to address the Hungarian minority media's uniform patterns of reporting and uncritical approach to minority political debates:<sup>9</sup>

1. The leaders or spokespersons of all four or five factions of DAHR should be interviewed regarding key events, decisions, etc. and not only the general establishment of DAHR.
2. If a politician asks to be interviewed or requests that his/her own article be published, and the topic regards another politician, party, or celebrity, the editors must ask those concerned to prepare their response before publication, so that the two opinions are published together.
3. Editors should not simply print articles by politicians, but instead interview all of the involved actors. Journalists must know how to summarize and mediate public debates and be able to determine what information the readers require to be able to make their own conclusions regarding the arguments.
4. In order for journalists to be seen as credible, trained and accurate professionals who seek objectivity, the names (signatures) and professions/positions

9. See, for example, the frequently cited argument "Koncz versus Szőcs" in *Szabadság*; the debate between local politicians in *Népújság* (Udvarhelyszék) and in *Udvarhelyi Híradó*. The common feature of these debates was that although they were hosted by the press, journalists did not get involved but rather stood on the sidelines, failing to even present the problems at hand. Hence the audience hardly understood the nature of the debates.



of those external authors who are not journalists or members of the editorial staff must be published along with their articles.

5. Minority journalists should not use the phrases ‘our party’, ‘our organization’, ‘our political leaders’, etc., which gives the reader an impression of bias in favor of certain political organizations.
6. Journalism practices should be monitored and financial support provided only to those media sources that meet the criteria included in these recommendations. Positive incentives must be provided to encourage the minority media to provide balanced and non-partisan information that can attract large audiences.
7. A special training session is needed for practicing news reporters including trainers from Hungary and/or other countries if possible.

#### *4.4. Recommendations regarding journalists use for expert sources*

My interviews and participant observations revealed that the Hungarian minority media lacks the basic connections with experts, scholars and professionals required to accurately report on specialist topics. When minority journalists do contact specialists to advise them on a story, they often expect the specialist to simply confirm pre-conceived ideas and stereotypes, especially when it comes to social science-related topics (such as one case where a marketing expert was ridiculed in a public broadcast for refusing to confirm that advertisers almost always lie).<sup>10</sup>

The connection between media representatives and specialists must be improved in a way that encourages journalists to 1) continuously rely on experts as information resources; 2) respect scientifically grounded information in their reporting; and 3) refrain from mixing fact and opinion. The following journalism standards should be monitored and perhaps regulated via the mechanisms described above:

1. Expert opinions or statements should be contrasted with those of experts in the particular field and never the journalist’s personal opinion.

10. An amusing example involved a nationalist and anti-Hungarian mayor who wanted to build a tunnel through a certain hill and was rebuffed by Hungarian journalists who stated that because the hill consisted of hard rock, it would be far too expensive to dig the tunnel at that location. When ethnic Hungarian geologists pointed out that the hill was not hard rock regardless of the political arguments, journalists attacked the geologists and labeled them as ‘not good Hungarians’. This example demonstrates that even natural science facts can be subordinated to political opinions, but the social sciences are subordinated most frequently, with researchers who present opinion surveys often labeled as charlatans.

2. As in Western countries, Hungarian minority journalists should gain basic, introductory knowledge in a variety of academic fields so they become capable of relating to academics and finding reliable specialist information when interviewing, comparing various expert opinions on the same topic, and using specialist terms.
3. A list of reliable resource persons for free use by journalists should be provided and updated by the Journalists' Association.
4. Journalists must not expect specialists to confirm pre-conceived stereotypes. They should report on the various opinions as they were originally conveyed.

## Conclusion

Although the policy recommendations proposed in this chapter may seem modest and obvious, any positive steps to address them could spark long-term and far-reaching reforms of the Hungarian minority media system in Romania at a crucial time. While avoiding the imposition of stifling and inflexible regulations, these positive incentives for journalists and measures promoting self-regulation could drastically improve the quality of the media intended to serve the 1.5 million Hungarians in Romania.

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